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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Sixty-third year

Identical letters dated 5 November 2008 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

I convey the present letter to you with a strong sense of urgency, knowing that the actions and events we wish to highlight are of extreme importance at this critical juncture. Tensions are high as, once again, reckless Israeli actions threaten to further destabilize the fragile situation and reignite the deadly cycle of violence between the two sides.

Today, thousands in the Gaza Strip are mourning the death of six Palestinians and are highly anxious about the prospects of renewed Israeli military attacks and violence against the besieged civilian population in the area. They started late on Tuesday, 4 November 2008, in the Gaza Strip when a number of Israeli tanks entered an area east of Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, launching intensive shelling as well as gunfire towards civilian houses. The indiscriminate Israeli shelling killed Saada Mazen and injured four others, including one woman. The Israeli occupying forces also destroyed two houses during the invasion and abducted seven civilians, including four women. At the same time, Israeli warplanes launched several strikes east of Deir Al-Balah, killing six Palestinians and injuring several others.

This latest Israeli military attack is a clear violation of the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire reached in June of this year which has brought a period of calm. Moreover, it signals an Israeli intention to reignite the cycle of violence and cause further suffering in an already devastated society, living a humanitarian disaster because of the punitive, inhumane siege that Israel, the occupying Power, has been imposing on the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza for more than a year.

At the same time, these irresponsible and violent actions come at a very critical juncture for Palestinians, who are preparing to meet in Cairo, under the auspices of Egypt, in an attempt to reach a much-sought national reconciliation agreement. Such scenes of death and destruction are sure to provoke anger and anxiety in Palestinian public opinion as well as in the leaderships of the factions due

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to meet in Cairo in the coming week. We perceive this senseless escalation of violence as a wilful Israeli attempt to interfere in internal Palestinian affairs and to undermine efforts under way in this regard and we absolutely reject and condemn such actions.

In addition to the military attacks on the Gaza Strip, Israel, the occupying Power, has also continued to undertake other illegal actions, especially in occupied East Jerusalem, which undermine peace efforts and provide further evidence as to the lack of goodwill and commitment towards peace of the Israeli side.

In and around occupied East Jerusalem, the occupying Power continues a feverish campaign of illegal seizure of properties as well as the closure of the city, aimed at the "quiet transfer" of the indigenous Palestinian population out of the city and the creation of more facts on the ground to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the city. Just today, the occupying Power demolished four homes in East Jerusalem, three in the Al-Bustan neighbourhood in Silwan, and another home in Shu'fat. During these illegal demolitions, the Israeli occupying forces injured at least seven Palestinian civilians. Simultaneously, Israel continues to pursue its escalating, illegal campaign of settlement construction and expansion in and around East Jerusalem.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, Israel continues to show utter disregard for Palestinian lives, properties and rights as the occupying forces choose to stand idly by and watch as Israeli settlers intensify their campaign of terror against Palestinian civilians, especially in Al-Khalil (Hebron). There, 650 armed and fanatic settlers continue to illegally seize homes, fields and other Palestinian properties and to daily harass, intimidate and cause harm to Palestinian civilians, including children. Moreover, in addition to the settler violence and terror, Al-Khalil, the largest Palestinian city in the West Bank, is also now a city whose economy has been choked by eight years of closure that have driven most business out of the city. Reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat indicate that more than 101 roadblocks, barricades and military checkpoints are preventing the pursuance of normal life in the city and are shredding its old city, for the sole purpose of facilitating the presence and movement of the Israeli settlers illegally transferred at the expense of the lives of the more than 150,000 Palestinian civilians in the city. This situation constitutes a serious impediment to peace and a stark violation of the clear obligations of Israel, as an occupying Power.

The international community, including the Security Council, has clear responsibilities in this regard, including the responsibility to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict, including foreign occupation. We call upon it to take urgent measures to redress this grave situation and bring an end to the above-mentioned Israeli violations. Israel must respect its obligations as an occupying Power under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. Action should be taken to compel Israel to cease its military campaign and its obstruction of the movement of persons and goods, including humanitarian assistance, in order to protect human life and alleviate the suffering of the civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in the Gaza Strip, where any semblance of normal life has been destroyed by the occupying Power's ongoing siege and attacks.

Moreover, Israel must be called upon to uphold its responsibility to protect the civilian Palestinian population from the attacks of settlers whose illegal presence it

has funded, protected and encouraged. Such actions are not only international legal obligations, they are necessary for assuring the international community of Israel's good faith and credibility in terms of its commitment to reaching a peace agreement, proving such a commitment is real and not just limited to rhetoric or semantics.

This letter is in follow-up to our previous 320 letters to you regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 28 September 2000. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 20 October 2008 (A/ES-10/424-S/2008/667), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of this letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations